DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 428 009 SO 029 611

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TITLE	Understanding India and Her Ethos: An Introduction. Fulbright Hays Summer Seninars Abroad 1996 (India).
SPONS AGENCY	Center for International Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	1998-09-11
NOTE	10p.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Area Studies; Assignments; Class Activities; *Cultural Context; Foreign Countries; Learning Activities; Secondary Education; Social Studies; Student Projects
IDENTIFIERS	*India; *Indian Culture

ABSTRACT

Designed for a teacher of social studies at the secondary level (grades 7-12) this curriculum project introduces students to different aspects of Indian culture. Along with introductory elements, the project offers suggestions for assignments and projects for students to complete. The curriculum project begins with brief sections on poverty/economics, history, religion, environment, and an overview of India. Class activities are listed week by week. A 7-item "working" bibliography concludes the project. (BT)

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Understanding India and Her Ethos: An Introduction. Fulbright Hays Summer Seninars Abroad 1996 (India).

by Patrick Murphy

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Preface

The following curriculum project is offered under the following context. It is designed for a teacher of social studies at the secondary level (7-12), who perhaps, like myself, has a fascination for India, but a shaky foundation to teach from. India is one of several units taught during a history course of a school year along with Greece, Rome, China, Egypt, etc. Or perhaps India is part of a geography class in which Southern Asia and the subcontinent is a unit that includes Nepal, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

These classes allow for approximately two to four weeks at the most in which to give your students a true feel for this wondrous part of the world. I have found that there are two schools of thought when approaching a dilemma such as this. Some feel it is necessary to break down the subject matter and concentrate one's efforts on a particular aspect of the nation, people or culture. For instance, one may wish to deal exclusively with art and architecture and through this one medium, a student will also learn much about history, government, religion, etc. Although the student focuses on one aspect of India (art and architecture), through his studies, he will become familiar with many subjects.

On the other hand, some believe a broad approach is better suited to their needs. No one aspect of a society is too deeply analyzed. The idea is to give many brief, but meaningful introductions to the students in as many areas as possible thus increasing the likelihood of hitting upon a subject a student may find interesting and piquing that interest enough so that the student is encouraged to pursue his interest in that topic in the future; perhaps for an extra credit project or a class in college or simply reading further during a student's free time.

I for one must admit my leaning toward the latter. As a student, I am constantly frustrated by how much there is that I want to know but how little time there is to find the answers. I believe in becoming the jack of all trades rather than the specialist; for when our specialty is not in demand, we have other means to fall back upon.

With this approach in mind, I have created this project to introduce different aspects of Indian culture to your students. Along with the introductory elements, there are suggestions for assignments and projects for students to complete. I believe every pursuit in school should have some

culminating event. Whether that is the completion of a project or performance or a final examination, the students should be focused on a particular goal from the onset of the unit. This goal should be referred to throughout the duration of the unit. I leave this culminating event for you to decide.

Understanding India and Her Ethos: An Introduction

(First Day of the Unit)

Ask your class to brainstorm the following and write some of their responses on the board.

What comes to mind when you hear the word "India?"

POVERTY/ECONOMICS

India with a population of almost 1 billion people has more people living in extreme poverty than any nation on earth. One-third live in conditions in which daily meals are not reliable and decent housing is not a reality. Life expectancy is 20-30 years less than the U.S. and adequate medical care is non existent.

On the other hand, India has more millionaires than any other nation on earth except the United States. There is a prosperous and growing middle class of 200-250 million Indians thirsting for consumer goods and working to add to the list of the rich in India. Real Estate in Bombay is the most expensive on earth (more than Tokyo and New York). India has become practically self sufficient agriculturally, has the greatest rail system in the world behind the U.S. and has massive industries in automobiles, textiles, computers, and the second biggest film industry behind Hollywood.

So it is true that extreme poverty exists in India, but as one finds time and again, India is a land of contradictions and paradoxes.

HISTORY

Perhaps no nation on earth has a more diverse and rich history than India. The Indus valley is one of the cradles of civilization and perhaps the first planned urban setting in human existence. Due to India's location, it has served as the bridge between East and West and unfortunately it has been the destination of a series of invaders throughout its past.

From the Aryan invasions of Ancient times to the series of Muslim conquerors to the British Raj; India has shown a remarkable tenacity and ability to learn from those who have come and in many instances, the visitors were absorbed into Indian culture. Because of this, Indian culture is incredibly diverse and impossible to narrowly define. Every form of government ever devised by man has been attempted in India. From oligarchy to democracy, India has served as the laboratory for human systems of rule.

RELIGION

India is the birthplace of many of the world's largest religions. Hinduism predates Christianity by many centuries. There are over 800,000,000 Hindu's in India. The sacred texts are a window into India's history and its culture today. Buddha, the enlightened one, was Indian. Over one billion Asian people subscribe to his beliefs. Although most westerners envision a chubby east Asian figure when his name is mentioned, he was Indian and lived a the foothills of the Himalayas. These two faiths alone total almost half the world's population.

Sikhism and Jainism are also religious groups whose beginning are in India. There is a large Christian population and the burial place of St. Thomas, one of Jesus disciples, is in India. There is even a significant Jewish population in the cities of India, and one of the oldest Synagogues in Asia can be found in the city of Cochin. Again, the world can study India to get a firsthand look at how people react to various religions and philosophies.

Eastern Philosophy and mysticism is a source of wonderment for many Westerners. People like the Beatles, come to India every year looking for answers to life's questions that the capitalistic ideas of the West seem to ignore. What do they know that seems to be a magnet to many people seeking enlightenment?

ENVIRONMENT

India is a massive country. It is about 1/3 the size of the United States including Alaska. Despite its huge population, it has a population density

significantly smaller than Europe. Much of India is undeveloped, and many believe it has the potential to become very wealthy from its supply of raw materials. On the other hand, India possesses some of the last virgin rain forest in the world. The Himalayas are breathtaking and for the most part have been spared from human development. The Thar Desert and the Deccan Plateau are not particularly hospitable to people and thus the wildlife of those regions has remained unharmed. Even in the heavily populated Indo-Gangetic Plain and along the coasts of India, the people of India have a respect for nature that is not as apparent in the West. Despite the good intentions of the Indian people, development is taking its toll on the environment. Parts of the Ganges River are incredibly polluted (this has religious ramifications). As India struggles to modernize, the by-products of industrialization are becoming more prevalent. Like many developing countries, India's future will be a balancing act that the rest of the world will be watching closely.

OVERVIEW:

India is a wondrous place that will provide an inexhausitive amount of material to study and dissect. It is full of paradoxes and mystery. The people are incredibly resilient and yet accepting of their circumstances. For every bit of heartache and decay there is equal amounts of beauty and wonder. To study India is to study the history of the world and all of mankind. By knowing its past we better understand our own beginnings and by studying its present, we may have a glimpse into our own future.

Week 1 Activities

1. Pass out a blank map of India to the students and have them label the following:

Bodies of Water	Cities	Land forms	Countries
Indian Ocean	Bombay	Himalayas	India
Arabian Sea	Delhi	Eastern Ghats	Pakistan
Bay of Bengal	Calcutta	Western Ghats	China
Ganges River	Madras	Thar Desert	Sri Lanka
Brahmaputra River	Cochin	Deccan Plateau	Iran
Indus River	Varanasi	Hindu Kush Mts.	Nepal
Persian Gulf	Hyderabad	Khyber Pass	Bangladesh
Caspian Sea	Goa	Tibetan Plateau	Myanmar
Narmada River	Bangalore		Afghanistan
Laccadive Sea			Tajikstan
Andaman Sea			Bhutan

Palk Strait

Test them by passing out the same blank map with random letters placed around the map at strategic places. Have them label the letters appropriately on an answer sheet.

*Geographic knowledge is essential when studying any country. Students will have a mental map when you discuss various issues and events about India.

2. Have students use their textbook or other sources to define the following vocabulary terms or identify the people:

ChandraGupta	Maharajah	Caste
Ashoka	Hindu	Jati
Mohandas Gandhi	Mantra	Kali
Sikh	Vedas	Curry
Brahma	Shiva	Babu
Karma	Akbar	Dhotti
Upanishads	Shan Jehan	Bhagavad Gita
Vishnu	Taj Mahal	Rupee
Krishna	Chakra	Moksha
Dharma	Guru	Madras
Sari	Raj	Chappati/Nan
Buddha	Sadhu	Vaishya
Raga	Sittar	Shudra
Ramayana	Kashtriya	Queen Victoria
Muslim	Mosque	Jain

* Throughout the study of India, students will be challenged with new vocabulary terms. To better prepare them, have them study ten words a week and quiz them on the definition and spelling of the words.

Week 2 Activities

3. Read about the cities of Harrapa and Mohenjo Daro in the Indus Valley civilization. Look closely at the planning and the exact specifications in the structure of the buildings. Inquire into why more is known of Ancient Egypt and China then of the Indus Valley. Why are there no grand ruins to view today?

4. Read about the Aryan invaders and from where did they come? How did they interact with the Indus people or the Dravidians? What new religious beliefs did they bring. A thorough discussion of the Vedas and Upanishads would be appropriate and perhaps some selected readings.

Week 3 Activities

5. Discuss the life of Siddhartha Gautama after reading from the text or selected articles. What was his biggest problem with Hinduism? What was the eight fold path? What were the four noble truths? How did the Brahmins respond to Buddha's teachings. Why are there so few true Buddhist's in India today and how does the Hindu God Vishnu relate to Buddha? Read about the ruler Ashoka? Like Paul to Christianity, Ashoka was widely responsible for the spread of Buddhism. What sparked his conversion? Students could mark on a map the routes of his missionaries.

6. Use the text and selected readings to read about the civil unrest in India prior to the arrival of the Muslims. Read about the Islamic invasions and the resulting Moghul Emperors. How did Islam interact with Hinduism? How do they relate today? Begin to discuss partition and the creation of Pakistan and E. Pakistan or Bangladesh. Look at examples of Hindu and Islamic architecture and the resulting fusion that took place. Pay particular attention to the Taj Mahal, considered one of the Man Made Wonders of the World.

Week 4 Activities

7. Begin to discuss the European Arrival on the Subcontinent. Portugal was the first European country to take a vested interest in India. Heavy Portuguese influence can still be seen in places like Goa today. Describe how the British eventually won out over the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the French, and built an empire in India. Read about the British East India Company and how the crown gave it free reign until the Sepoy Rebellion. What contributions did British rule make to Indian society? Why did the British system work so well in India? The government and the legal system today is quite similar to those in the United Kingdom. Although the Indian people were thirsting for independence, some feel the British presence in India was not entirely bad. The English language is the most universal in the country. The railroad system was built during the British Raj.

* *A Passage to India* by E.M. Forester is a wonderful movie to show in class about the clash between British culture and the Indian people.

8. Read selected passages about the life of Mohandas Gandhi. Inquire into the independence movement. Who was Rabindranath Tagore and Jawarhal Nehru? How, if at all, did the Muslims and the Hindus work together toward independence? Where did Gandhi receive his education and where did he form the foundation for his non-violent resistance movement? Discuss how Martin Luther king Jr. adopted many of Gandhi's principles during the Civil rights movement in America. How did Gandhi die and what impact did it have on the country? In what way did the hasty exit of the British from India contribute to partition of the country? How do Indians feel about Pakistan and Bangladesh today?

9. An overview of contemporary India would be a fitting conclusion to the unit. The political spectrum in India has been shaken up lately as the long time ruling party has been rocked by scandal. India has been reluctant to sign a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty which has caused some friction with the United States. A large portion of Western computerized services are being performed in India. Why is this occurring? The plight of the Bengal Tiger has been one of the more publicized cases in the ongoing battle to protect endangered species. The never-ending dispute with Pakistan over the Kashmir region continues to strain ties between the two countries. With over a half billion voters, each year India conducts the world's largest democratic elections. How do they pull off this monumental task? The plight of women in India has been a question often raised. Are they truly discriminated? If so, how did Indira Gandhi become the highest ranking official in the Indian government? Using the Reader's Guide and accessing various periodical's; a teacher could thoroughly investigate a number of contemporary issues in India. U.S. relations with India have been very interesting since independence in the 1940's. What events have helped formulate the current diplomatic status between the two countries?

Working Bibliography

Although there are an abundance of books that a teacher could utilize when teaching a unit of study on India, I offer this small sampling as an example of some publications that I found particularly useful.

Barrier, Gerald. *India and America; America Publishing on India 1930-1985.* New Delhi: American Institute of Indian Studies, 1986.

Brown, W. Norman. *The United States and India, and Pakistan, and Bangladesh,* 3rd rev., ed., Cambridge: Harvard. paperback, 1972.

Eck, Diana. *Darsan; Seeing the Divine Image of India.* 2nd. rev. ed. 1985

Heimsath, Charles H. *Teachers' Introduction to India.* New Delhi: Educational Resources Centre, 3rd rev., ed., 1994.

Masselos, Jim. ed., *India Creating a Modern Nation,* New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1990.

Narayan, Sunithi L. *Discover Sublime India,* Madras: Kartik Printers, 2nd rev. ed., 1993.

One can also find a wealth of information in the various travel guides about India. I have found the most useful and pleasurable to read to be the handbooks produced in the Lonely Planet Series; particularly *India; A Survival Guide,* and *Delhi.* These publications are revised and updated annually.